
THE NATIONAL INTERAGENCY COMPLEX INCIDENT MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION STUDY

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OCTOBER XX, 2003

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“The management of wildland fire and the forces required to do this job effectively represent a core business of the wildland agencies; it is the script of our signature.

Perhaps in the past, as stated in Fire on the Mountain and other reports, we lacked the fortitude or will to make necessary changes in the program to ensure it remains at a leading-edge level.”

*Policy Implications of Large Fire Management:
A Strategic Assessment of Factors Influencing
Costs – A report by the Strategic Overview of
Large Fire Costs Team
January 21, 2000*

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Executive Summary

In March 2003 the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) chartered a Management Options Team to examine organizational alternatives that balance local resource management work and complex incident management responsibilities. The team is soliciting input from agency administrators, wildland fire executives, and interested parties.

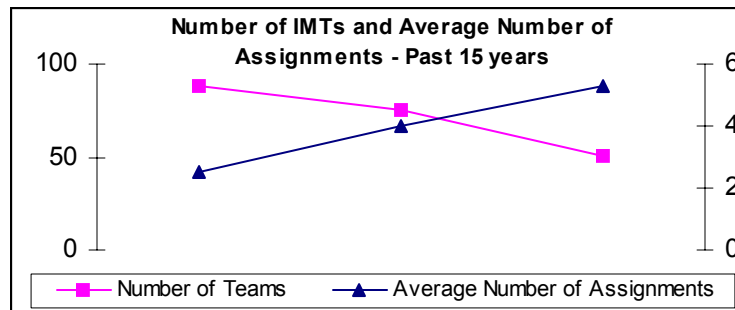
In January 2000, *An Agency Strategy for Fire Management* was completed, which recommended the Forest Service create a Large Incident Management Organization (NIMO) to “more effectively, efficiently and successfully posture itself for the future”. Little was done with this report until early 2003 when based on impacts associated with the 2002 fires; the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) chartered an interagency National Incident Management Organization (NIMO) Management Options Team to:

- Review *An Agency Strategy for Fire Management* report.
- Evaluate alternative implementation strategies for the National Incident Management Organization and the Full Agency Participation options referred to in this report.
- Develop recommendations and evaluate the ramifications, impacts, feasibility, costs and effectiveness of implementing the report’s actions.
- Develop specific implementation options available to the interagency fire community.
- Ensure that these recommendations and implementation options meet overall agency resource goals and objectives, the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, and the National Fire Plan.

Background

Over the past ten years, a number of internal reviews and reports have been completed by land management agencies, Congressional subcommittees, GAO, OMB and the National Academy of Public Administration. These reviews continue to point out that public lands are at risk and express concern at the rising expense of protecting them. Major cultural and demographic changes in the work force, and programmatic changes in the agencies have resulted in increased costs and a reduction in agency workforce participation on large incidents. The competing workload of simultaneously meeting fire program management and resource management objectives on the home unit, while meeting the needs of complex incident management has brought the agencies to a strategic crossroads.

During the past 15 years the number of Type I Interagency IMTs decreased 10% and Type II Interagency IMTs decreased 50%. All Type I and Type II IMTs have been committed at the same time 10 of the last 25 years. The use of Interagency IMTs has increased from 2.5 assignments (pre 1998) to 4.0 assignments (1994 to 2003) and to 5.3 assignments in 2003. Today an average of 6000 overhead positions are deployed each year for an average of 60 days each in support of complex incident management.



Over the next five years, the Interagency Type 1 and Type 2 Incident Management Teams and Area Command Teams will turn over 92% of their Command and General Staffs (473 of 512 positions) due to retirements, tenure, or inability or unwillingness to participate.

The NIMO Study offers agencies with wildland fire responsibilities a clear choice in both leadership and management of complex incident management. Choosing a “non-NIMO” option will either fail to improve complex incident management or will result in many years of implementation because of the evolution of policy changes proposed. The unknown realities of response to the National Response Plan, and the increasing workload in wildland fire responses, coupled with the declining numbers of qualified people to staff IMT’s in a volunteer militia management philosophy, may create a Federal Wildland Fire Service or the Homeland Security Agency may seize a lead nationally in all complex incident management needs for the future, including wildland fires.

The NIMO Options offer an opportunity to change management philosophy in how agencies conduct their complex incident management business. The NIMO Options, as written offer specifics in numbers and costs. The reality will be if a NIMO Option is chosen, the leadership will organize NIMO personnel to follow an adaptive management philosophy to be responsive to all complex incident management needs in the future and provide resources to the agencies for land management activities (fuels) and support fire program management needs.

In the past decade, there have been two revisions of the Federal Fire Policy; A National Fire Plan has been implemented with approximately 2 billion dollars in additional funding and the employment of thousands of additional firefighters; A Wildland Fire Leadership Council has been formed; and an interagency strategy to reduce wildland fire risks in the environment has been developed. We have witnessed five years of “mega-fire” occurrences, which have exceeded our ability to mobilize and to develop a strategy to effectively manage these fires. We have experienced a terrorist attack on our homeland. An average of 25 wildland firefighter fatalities has occurred from all associated causes annually over the last ten years. Each of these events has affected the management of our public lands and our response to complex incident management.

It is imperative that the Federal Wildland Fire Agencies partner with the Department of Homeland Security for support of NIMO Options.

THE NIMO MANAGEMENT OPTION TEAM TASK

The NIMO task is focused on the issues associated with complex incident management. While we need to continue to improve our application of incident management organization and tactics, the strategic goal still remains improving the condition of the nation's public lands.

The team has factored into the analysis concern about fire leadership. Those concerns deal with the competing priorities in providing leadership:

- (1) On the local units and at State/Regional/National levels
- (2) Relating to complex incident management
- (3) Relating to the natural resource management work of agencies
- (4) Relating to all risk incident support

THE TEAM HAS DEVELOPED BROAD STRATEGIC ALTERNATIVES GENERALLY DESCRIBED AS:

- No action – current situation
- Enhanced current situation
- Three variations of NIMO
- Increased capacity of all agencies

All alternatives have the following in common:

- Assume commitment of additional resources (people & money) to the complex incident management arena and significantly enhanced priority for incident management support in the natural resource management agencies through new policy.
- Focus on change.
- Will require enhanced contracting emphasis.
- Work within the confines of an increasing, but not pre-eminent, role in non-wildfire emergency.

The NIMO Team believes a model of strong local forces built on the strength of interagency cooperation, is a fundamental basis for the future. The success of any of the alternatives is predicated on the local ability to effectively manage Type 3 complexity incidents with strong Interagency T3 Incident Management Teams. Success also relies on the ability to quickly and efficiently mobilize, deploy, manage, and demobilize interagency Type 1 & 2 Incident Management, and Area Command Teams.

Success in a selected option will result in:

- More person-days available to do local natural resource management project work
- Improved initial attack and extended attack.
- Improved integration and leadership in the area of fire, fuels, and vegetation management
- A safer and more cost effective complex incident management program

The objective is to have a consensual interagency decision ready to implement in FY05.

Without making significant organizational changes, the agencies will fail at the overall strategic goal of managing the changing conditions of our Nation's public lands. The time has come to go beyond reports and data and listen quietly to the words of John Maclean in *Fire on the*

Mountain; “...perhaps we lack the fortitude or will to make the necessary program changes to ensure it remains at a leading-edge level.”

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